

Issue Management of Joko Widodo's Policy in Ensuring Effective Government Communication Regarding the Case of Rice Import

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Abstract. This research aims to analyze Joko Widodo's issue management in establishing government's communication in the case of rice import by Ministry of Trade. This research uses the issue life-cycle theory proposed by Stephen Littlejohn and issue management theory by Howard Chase. This study also uses constructivist paradigm and qualitative approach. Meanwhile, the research method used is case study. To collect data, the researchers conduct in-depth interview and observation. The result of analysis shows that government communication did not fulfil the standard of public issue management and has brought harm for society due to the government's inability to solve the case of rice import right away. The conclusion of this study is the government has failed to manage the case of rice import and establish an effective communication about the issue.

Keywords: issue management, policy, government communication, the case of rice import

1 Introduction

Towards the 2019 Indonesian general election, there was a raising debate on deciding whether or not the government needs to import rice. Enggartiasto Lukita as the Minister of Trade, Andi Amran Sulaiman as the Minister of Agriculture, and Budi Waseso as the President Director of Indonesian Bureau of Logistics involved in this debate. The Ministry of Trade released a statement that rice import is needed to meet the demand within the country. However, the Ministry of Agriculture argued that such activity is not necessary as Indonesia has a surplus in its rice production. Indonesian Bureau of Logistics also agreed that the country did not have to import rice due to the same argument.

The case of rice import before the 2019 Indonesian general election was a public issue. The issues remained unsolved for months since Joko Widodo had not made his decision. <https://www.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/news-analysis/18/09/19/pfarxf377-polemik-impor-beras-dan-kegeraman-buwas>. Hamdani, the member of Commission VI of People's Representative Council from the fraction of Nasdem, demanded the Minister of Trade and the President Director of Indonesian Bureau Logistics to solve the issue internally. <https://ekbis.sindonews.com/berita/1339938/34/nasdem-minta-kisruh-impor-beras-diselesaikan-internal-kabinet>. There was a risk of rice price fluctuation in the days nearing the general election held on April 2019. Political attack from the opponents on the 2018 rice import policy is relatively easy to be countered as the previous presidency did the same thing

for maintaining power. <https://tirto.id/jor-joran-buka-izin-impor-beras-mengamankan-jokowi-di-2019-cUkv>

Jokowi had released Presidential Instruction Number 9 of 2015 on Management of Public Communication. The instruction aims to help his cabinet in receiving public aspiration and accelerate the delivery of information about government's policies and programs. In addition to that, Article 1 of the Presidential Regulation Number 3 of 2011 says: "There will be Presidential Special to facilitate presidential duties". Article 2 verse 1 of the same regulation also says: "Presidential Special Staff will do tasks that differ from those included in ministry and other government institutions". Meanwhile, Article 2 verse 2 states that one of the affairs of Presidential Special Staff is information. These Special Staff have a task to build good image of the government so that it can earn good judgement from people.

President Joko Widodo also formed a Presidential Staff Office (KSP) to carry out an effective public issue management that ensure all programs are in accordance with the President's vision and mission. KSP is a Presidential Staff Unit formed through the Presidential Regulation No. 26 of 2015 concerning the Presidential Staff Office. The aim of it is to provide support to the President and Vice President in controlling the implementation of three strategic activities, namely the Implementation of the National Priority Program, activities related to presidential political communication, and management of strategic issues concerning the lives of people. President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) had also issued a Presidential Decree (Keppres) regarding the formation of a Presidential Communication Team. The communication pattern begins with the Presidential Communication Team discussing with Jokowi on issues that are of public concern. The President will then decide how the media communication will be carried out based on the results of the discussion. The Presidential Communication Team will process the issues first before discussing with the President on what kind of communication strategy that should be applied on certain issues.

The issue management carried out by the Presidential Communication Team and the Ministry of Trade's Public Relations should follow a certain rule. The management of public issues allows organizations to either make government policies on issues that affect them or adapt to policy changes [1]; [2]; [3]. There are some efforts in managing issues: monitoring, identifying, analyzing, making strategic policies, implementing policies that aim to anticipate issues, and evaluating the impact of policies to support the continuity of company or organizational activities [4]; [5]; [6]. Issue management is part of corporate campaign theory [7]. One of the issue management theories is called issue life-cycle theory. This theory divides issue into two categories: positive issue refers to issues that are being managed by organizations or resolved issues; negative issue refers to issues remain unsolved because organizations fail to create political solutions in the form of regulation or litigation [8].

In general, issue life-cycle theory is used in three perspectives, namely the perspective of public policy, corporate strategy, and pressure and interest groups that try to set a social agenda [9], [10]; [11]. The Issue Management Cycle model is a model developed by W. Howard Chase [12], [13]. This model explains steps that should be taken by organizations in responding to public issues, namely: (1) Identification of Issues. (2) Issue Analysis. (3) Issue Change Strategy. (4) Issue Action Program. (5) Evaluation of Results. Issue management is not about how to manage problems, but how to manage because problems have appeared. Issue management does not only pay attention to the standards used to assess issues, but also to the various argumentation platforms used to articulate and assess issues [14].

Based on the informational background explained, a research question raised by the researchers is: How does Jokowi conduct management issue in establishing an effective government communication in the case of rice import by the Ministry of Trade?

2 Research Method

This study uses constructivist paradigm, qualitative approach, and case study method. The strength of the method lies in refining theory and the complexity of the issues offered [15]; [16]. In collecting data, the researchers conduct in-depth interviews and observations. Key informants for this study involve the Main Expert of Deputy IV of the Presidential Staff Office, Ali Mochtar Ngabalin; the Head of Public Relations Bureau of the Ministry of Trade, Marolop Panggabean; the Principal Expert Staff of the Presidential Staff Office, Ali Mochtar Ngabalin; the Member of the Central Information Commission, Romanus Ndaulendong; and a political communication expert, Dr. Afdal Makkuraga Putra. The data is analyzed by conducting data reduction, data presentation, and verification (drawing conclusions). In checking data validity, the technique used is method triangulation. Method triangulation is a data checking technique that uses various data sources such as documents, archives, interviews, and observations [17]; [18].

3 Results and Discussion

The results of the study include two things that will answer the research question: an overview of the issue of rice imports in the days nearing the 2019 election and issue management of rice import in the Presidential Staff Office (KSP) and the Ministry of Trade. They will be explained as follow. As a party that is responsible to give response regarding the issue of rice import, Deputy II of the Presidential Staff Office (KSP), Yanuar Nugrohom delivered a statement on February 20th 2018, at 18.05 West Indonesia Time: "Food security does not mean we do not have to import rice at all, we have not achieved that level yet. The government is ensuring that we still have power to import rice whenever the stock within the country is insufficient."

On the other hand, the Main Expert of Deputy IV of the Presidential Staff Office, Ali Mochtar Ngabalin, has emphasized through an interview that the Presidential Staff Office (KSP) bears a responsibility to establish the Presidential Palace's political communication and to manage strategic issues. "Whenever an issue arises, the Presidential Palace will establish external communication through the Presidential Spokesperson, the Presidential Staff Office, and the Presidential Special Staff. If there are issues that remain unclear, they will be discussed in the Presidential Staff Office. There will be a discussion in News Room regarding clarifications of issues that have spread among people. We are assigned to clarify, explain, or think. We have a task to deliver information to people. Meanwhile, the State Secretariat will deal with analysis on those issues. As spokesperson is included in Cabinet Secretariat, they are also involved in Communication Team. When our current presidential spokesperson, Johan Budi, was busy with his affairs on being legislative candidate, President Joko Widodo asked me to deliver issues discussed. Of course, I work for and on behalf of the President. In the Presidential Palace, there is a deputy of Information Dissemination and Political Communication. Information dissemination is assigned to manage the entire information's. I am the Main Expert of the deputy."

Furthermore, Ali Mochtar Ngabalin explained that the Presidential Staff Office's task is to manage the country's political communication, including the case of rice import. They consider it as a strategic issue that should be handled. "We have discussed about the data from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Indonesian Bureau of Logistics, and the Ministry of

Trade. After we had held the meeting, the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) released a data. In the Presidential Palace, there was a limited meeting chaired by the Vice President. All of the data was obtained from the State Secretariat. So, after getting a task to deliver information to the public, I will consult first with the Presidential Staff Office and the State Secretariat. If I get a permission to deliver the information publicly, I will do it. If there is a mistake in my statement, it will be corrected by the deputy or the Presidential Staff Office (Moeldoko). For example, when there is a mistake in terms of my choice of words.”

The case of rice import that involves several Ministry/Institution should not be seen as merely a problem. There is a big possibility that this includes conflict of interest. This suspicion could be right regarding the case that remains unsolved for a long period. Ali Mochtar Ngabalin said: “If a minister makes a statement, and on behalf of the palace, the statement should be in accordance with the decision made by the President. That is considered as a political news of this country. All of the information released by the palace must not contradict with information released by ministry/institution. The data of rice import obtained from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, the State Secretariat, and the Presidential Staff Office should not be different from one another. The Presidential Staff Office is the party that is responsible to manage political information for public. If certain regulations have been made, the Presidential Staff Office will be notified. After that, we make a narration to be delivered to public. This is the President’s working unit. We, including ministry/institution, should not aim to do a mission of practical politics. We should focus on the state’s politics, the President’s politics.”

President Jokowi has an egalitarian communication style. When establish a communication with the Presidential Staff Office as well as its staff, he does it in the right portion. According to Ali Mochtar Ngabalin: “Mr. Jokowi has an egalitarian communication pattern. He will call the main expert right away (for example, me) and says that he wants to do doorstep interview.”

3.1 Communication Management by the Ministries’ Public Relations

The Head of the Public Relations Bureau of the Ministry of Trade, Marolop Panggabean, emphasized that the Ministry of Trade is obliged to carry out rice stabilization if the domestic supply is running low, followed by an increase in the rice price. However, the Ministry of Trade did not say too much about the rice import polemic ahead of the 2019 elections. “Regarding rice imports, the Minister will immediately provide an explanation to the public. The Minister is the person who knows the Palace’s policy on rice imports.” The Minister of Trade, Enggatiasto Lukita, said that rice import is necessary considering that the domestic supply is running low accompanied by indications of rising prices.

According to Marolop Nainggolan, Bulog should not question the need to import rice, because that is their job afterall. “Why are there differences of opinion between the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Indonesian Bureau of Logistics? The causes are many. Possibly, this is an attempt to get the attention of the general public because it was approaching the 2019 elections. However, if we pay attention, the President was not dragged into the maneuver or polemic of the relevant parties.”

Marolop Nainggolan explains further, “Whoever the minister is, if the price of rice rises, which means that supply in the market is running low, imports must be done. Concerning the presence or absence of political interests, I think at that time the leaders of the Institutions did have interests, I don’t know whether those interests were political interests, but clearly they might want to attract public attention because it was approaching the 2019 elections.

The Minister is the one who communicated directly to the Palace related to the policy. We only carried out the Minister's orders."

Political Public Relations should coordinate between agencies to handle information and data [19]; [20] including in this case of rice imports. Information is a powerful political weapon, so they should be spread selectively. Government restrictions and/or distortions are important elements in the management of public opinion. The Public Relations Division must have state information management resources that can have a profound influence on the lives of citizens [21], [20]. Difference in rice import data clearly shows that the information management activities in Political Public Relations did not go well. The difference in data between the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Agriculture, Bulog, and BPS shows that data management has failed to serve its purpose as a strong weapon to maintain the good image of the government.

The Presidential Staff Office, which is tasked with managing strategic issues, did not appear in the mass media or on the ksp.go.id portal to provide information regarding this rice import issue. They also did not manage the issue of the polemic. Management of the issue occurred at the Ministry of Trade, because based on interviews with the Head of the Public Relations Bureau, the handling of the issue of rice imports was carried out directly by the Minister of Trade Enggartiaso Lukita. Regarding differences in data, a meeting chaired by Vice President Jusuf Kalla finally agreed to use the Central Statistics Agency data. According to political communication expert Afdal Makkuraga Putra, the decision was appropriate because the Central Statistics Agency is indeed tasked with recording and conducting surveys for all kind of data in Indonesia. Therefore, if there are data differences, the government should use the data from Central Statistics Agency.

In handling the rice import polemic, the Presidential Staff Office did not do much. With reference to the theory of negative issues [22], the issue of rice imports became a negative issue as the Presidential Staff Office could not resolve the issue. The issue of rice imports has been a prolonged polemic. In fact, President Joko Widodo himself did not make a settlement other than handing it over to Coordinating Minister for the Economy Darmin Nasution and Vice President Jusuf Kalla. In fact, until the voting was completed on April 18th, 2019, Jokowi, who was re-elected as President for the second period, still did not respond to the issue of rice imports.

The rice import polemic is not only a matter of data, as stated by Vice President Jusuf Kalla. Behind the scene, there was a conflict of interests of the actors involved, namely the Minister of Trade, the President Director of the Indonesian Bureau of Logistics, and the Minister of Agriculture. This is in line with the results of another study (Kusumah, 2019) which stated that the rice import policy competition in the Jokowi era tends to be won by the Ministry of Trade. The Ministry of Trade can issue a rice import permit while the Ministry of Agriculture only has the authority to recommend the Ministry of Trade. This is in line with the opinions of several other researchers [23], [24] who say public policy is the result of an internal conflict within government.

The polemic on rice import policy is the result of a conflict of interests of political actors that adversely affects the public and contradicts the objectives of issue management. In addition, the purpose of issue management is to ensure that related organizations can think and act not only in their own interests, but also in the public interest [25], [26]. In practice, issue management in this case did not go well. This is likely due to the lack of human resource capacity to understand, mobilize, coordinate, and direct all strategic planning and policy functions to achieve a goal [14], [27].

Meanwhile, the conflict between the Minister of Trade and the Managing Director of Bulog dragged on because the President was less assertive in making decisions [28]. According to the Afdal Political Communication Expert, President Joko Widodo has a tendency to please all parties, which makes the public think that our government is not firm. The President's indecision in the rice import polemic has a negative impact on the image of the government itself. The flow of public communication and information for the 2019 President Jokowi Government Communication Team is as follows:

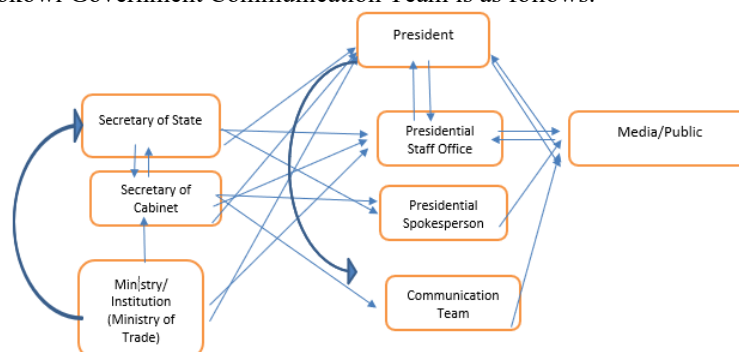


Fig 1. Model of Communication Flow and Public Information of the Government Communication Team of President Jokowi's Era.

4 Conclusions

In this study, there are several conclusions that can be drawn: The President's Public Relations on the issue of the polemic on rice imports ahead of the 2019 elections was mostly carried out by the Presidential Staff Office (KSP) and the Ministry of Trade's Public Relations. This is not in accordance with Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2015 concerning Management of Public Communication. Issue management in both institutions is also far from standard issue management.

Government communication is not in accordance with standards for managing public issues and is detrimental to the public interest. In carrying out government communications, the president forms the Government Communication Team to deal with strategic issues. This team consists of KSP, Spokesman, Special Staff, and public relations in the Ministry / Institution. This shows that the number and structure are actually qualified to implement good issue management. However, in the management of the issue of rice imports, government communication is not going well which is marked by a protracted polemic over the issue.

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